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ABSTRACT

The knowledgeable professional who works with special children recognizes that the parents of special children have an important effect in the children's development. The paper states that in China, parent involvement in special children's education has been limited by the parents' need to work and their lack of counseling experience with special needs children. With the development of Chinese special education, more professionals now are aware of the gravity of the situation. The paper suggests that through behavior counseling, parents can create healthy parent-child interactions, get involved positively in their child's education, and contribute more to the growth of their child. The assumption of behavior counseling is that most human behavior is learned and can be changed. Studies have shown that special children have many problem behaviors. The paper also suggests that teaching parents the principles and skills of behavior management can bring about specific changes in their child's behavior. It describes behavioral counseling as having four essential stages: (1) understanding the feelings of parents; (2) developing a close relationship with parents; (3) helping parents learn and apply behavioral principles; and (4) keeping in touch with parents. (JDM)

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Behavior Counseling Parents of Special Children

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Introduction

The knowledgeable professional who works with special children recognizes that parents of special children have an important effect in children's development. If we ignore the importance of parents, our educational efforts will lessen the effectiveness. From the following reasons, we can see the roles of parents:

Special children spend a lot of their lifespan to live with their parents. They are influenced by their parents in cognitive and emotional development.

Parents can help and teach their child by one-to-one.

The rearing responsibility makes parent pay more attention to their special child than other people.

But, in China, parent involvement in special children's education was limited. There were two reasons, first, father and mother both need work, second, counseling parents of special children was lacking. There was few of professional counseling institutions who works for parents of special children. Parents lack of necessary knowledge and skills of special education to teach their child. With the development of Chinese special education, more and more professionals now are aware of the gravity that we should help parents of special children. Through behavioral counseling, we can help parents to build healthy parent-child interaction, to involve positively their child's educational actions, to give more contributions to the growth of their child.

Behavioral Counseling

Behavioral counseling was accepted by practitioners in many years ago. Through a long time research, professionals made some essential statements of behavioral counseling.

The fundamental assumption is that most human behavior is learned and can be changed.

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The theoretical basis is learning theory. Counseling strategies are based on the principle of learning.

The purpose is to decrease ineffective behavior, develop effective behavior that are personally self-fulfilling, productive, and socially acceptable.

Emphasizing that the changing of observed behavior is measurable.

Behavioral Counseling Parents of Special Children

In parent intervention programs, professionals are aware of the productive contributions that parents can make toward their child's growth. Our studies show that all kinds of special children have a lot of problem behavior and could not adapte society. We should teach parents the principles and skills of behavior management. Through learning, parents can bring about specific changes in their child's behavior.

The process of Behavioral Counseling

We think that behavioral counseling consists four essential stages. The counselor will face different tasks to deal with in different stages.

Stage I: Understand the feelings of parents.

Researchers have found when a child is diagnosed as disabled, his parent will go through a series of reaction period such as shock and disruption, denial, sadness, anxiety and fear, anger and finally adaptation. Besides these, parents report that they feel guilt. Sometimes the relationship between family members change, marital issue arises because father and mother have different attitude toward their disabled child. Many parents feel they have lost control over their own home and life, they need deal with a very difficult thing by themselves, and want to seek supports to help them to get through it. The counselor can give parents psychological comforts and supports by listening and communicating empathic understanding.

Stage II: Develop a close relationship with parents.

Counselors must maintain a positive attitude towards parents. Counselors must encourage parents to express their feelings, their questions and their suggestions. The conversation between counselors and parents should be relaxed, happy and effective.

Stage III: Help parents learn and apply behavioral principles.

In this period, counselors and parents should decide how to meet the parents' needs and what technique will be effective. O'Dell believes behavior modification is useful for parents. Behavior modification techniques are easy to learn for parents. Through learning and applying behavior principles, parents can manage their child's behavior.

Training parents in behavior modification:

Before using behavior modification techniques, parents should have an understanding of what a behavior is, how behavior are learned, and how to influence a behavior.

Parents should realize the basic principle of behavior modification that behavior is learned, can be taught. Human behavior is learned through interaction with the other person and surrounding environment.

Parents should master the law of behavior reinforcement.

Also, parents should master the steps of behavior modification . The steps are following:

Selecting a target behavior.

Recording the incidence of problem behavior.

Identifying appropriate reinforcers.

Implementing behavior intervention.

Evaluating behavior intervention.

When planning behavior intervention, parents should take the disable category of child and the pattern of child's problem behavior into account.

According Stewart's view(1986), using behavior modification techniques, parents can manage their child's behavior in the following aspects:

Maintaining adaptive behavior.

Shaping a new adaptive behavior.

Increasing or strengthening a good or adaptive behavior

Decreasing or weakening a bad or mal-adaptive behavior.

Applying behavior modification techniques, parents develop two kinds of ability of special children:

Language ability.

Self-helping ability.

In the past, behavior modification for special children were focused primarily on eliminating problem behavior. Now we find that if the problem behavior is reduced in one

context, it might reappear in another context. So, we should be prudent in using punishment procedure. We suggest that parents use positive reinforcement to reward child's in-seat behavior, not use punishment to decrease child's out-seat behavior. Keep the positive mood is useful for the growth of child.

Stage IV: Keep in touch with parents.

When parents implement behavior modification plan, counselor should keep contacting with parents by individual interviews, telephone conversation. Counselors help parents evaluate the effect of behavior intervention, select the best way to involve themselves in the education program of their child. The purpose of behavioral counseling of parents of special children is help parents broaden their involvement to enhance child's growth.

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